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Intervention In Cuban Affairs

Speech of

Hon. Samuel Pasco

1898

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S. F. R.

INTERVENTION IN CUBAN AFFAIRS.

“We can make no better beginning than by declaring at the outset that the Republic is free and independent; and, with this free and independent Government as an ally, our cause will have the good will of the lovers of human liberty the world over.”

S P E E C H

OF

HON. SAMUEL PASCO,
OF FLORIDA,

IN THE

SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES,

Saturday, April 16, 1898.

WASHINGTON.
1898

SPEECH
OF
HON. SAMUEL PASCOR.

The Senate having under consideration the joint resolution (S. R. 149) for the recognition of the independence of the people of Cuba, demanding that the Government of Spain relinquish its authority and government in the Island of Cuba, and to withdraw its land and naval forces from Cuba and Cuban waters, and directing the President of the United States to use the land and naval forces of the United States to carry these resolutions into effect—

Mr. PASCOR said:

Mr. PRESIDENT: Though I have participated but little in the debates in the Senate upon the different phases of the Cuban question as they have from time to time been presented here, I have been greatly interested in the uprising of the people there against the domination of Spain, and my earnest sympathy has constantly been with them in the brave struggle for independence and a republican form of government which they have thus far maintained against a powerful opponent, superior in numbers, in discipline and training, and in the resources of war. The Cubans are near neighbors to the people of Florida. We have desired and hoped for their success in this unequal contest; and in advocating the fullest measure of recognition that our people and our Government could give them, according to the usage and practice of civilized nations, I have always been in entire harmony with the best sentiment of the State which I have the honor in part to represent.

The two Houses of Congress were satisfied from the information that had reached them more than two years ago that the contest had advanced beyond a condition of temporary and lawless resistance to constituted authority, beyond a mere revolt or insurrection, and they solemnly and formally declared by a concurrent resolution that there was a state of war in Cuba with all that is signified by that expressive word. It meant that the Cubans were an organized force, that they were maintaining an army in the field, that they were capable of joining battle with Spain, and that in the opinion of the Senate and the House of Representatives of the United States the armed men sent into the field by this organized force were soldiers and not lawbreakers and criminals, and that they should be treated, whenever they fell into the hands of their enemies, according to the laws of civilized warfare. More than a year later, in May, 1897, the Senate made a like declaration in the form of a joint resolution, and it was sent to the House of Representatives, but it was never passed by that body. These findings and declarations have been fully justified by the subsequent history of the contest.

Spain, with all her vast resources, has failed to restore her civil authority over the island, force has been continually met by force, and a governmental organization with armed soldiers to sustain

it has maintained itself in open defiance of the Spanish Government ever since our first declaration of the existence of actual war.

Notwithstanding this deliberate action of the Senate, twice repeated, and the terrible array of facts developed during the debates, there was no response to these resolutions by the Executive, and the conflict, whether war or not, has gone on till weeks have lengthened into months and months into years.

Meanwhile army after army has been sent by Spain to put down those who have been resisting her authority by force and arms. Sections of country have been desolated so that the inhabitants might have no opportunity to afford aid and comfort to the revolutionists. The people driven from their homes have been compelled to remain in towns and villages within the Spanish lines of defense, and the Senate and the country have recently been informed by members of this body who have gone to Cuba and witnessed the actual conditions there of the suffering and starvation and sacrifice of life that has been going on among these reconcentrados and still continues. The civilized world has been shocked by the sad and terrible revelations.

The time has at last come for some action on the part of Congress to settle our differences with Spain and to relieve her victims from the oppression and sufferings which they have long endured. Diplomacy has failed. The President has despaired of accomplishing any results by further negotiation and has turned over the issue to Congress. In doing this he says, "I have exhausted every effort to relieve the intolerable condition of affairs which is at our doors," and he is now awaiting our action.

Those who have had some experience in war are fully aware of its horrors, and would gladly see this as well as all our international differences settled by peaceful methods; but these methods have failed, and the committee to whom the President's message and the resolutions it evoked were referred have, after careful deliberation, reported their recommendations, some of which I propose briefly to discuss before the vote is taken.

The preamble and resolutions of the committee are as follows:

Joint resolution for the recognition of the independence of the people of Cuba, demanding that the Government of Spain relinquish its authority and government in the Island of Cuba, and to withdraw its land and naval forces from Cuba and Cuban waters, and directing the President of the United States to use the land and naval forces of the United States to carry these resolutions into effect.

Whereas the abhorrent conditions which have existed for more than three years in the Island of Cuba, so near our own borders, have shocked the moral sense of the people of the United States, have been a disgrace to Christian civilization, culminating, as they have, in the destruction of a United States battle ship, with 236 of its officers and crew, while on a friendly visit in the harbor of Havana, and can no longer be endured, as has been set forth by the President of the United States in his message to Congress of April 11, 1898, upon which the action of Congress was invited: Therefore,

Resolved by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled, First, That the people of the Island of Cuba are, and of right ought to be, free and independent.

Second, That it is the duty of the United States to demand, and the Government of the United States does hereby demand, that the Government of Spain at once relinquish its authority and government in the Island of Cuba and withdraw its land and naval forces from Cuba and Cuban waters.

Third, That the President of the United States be, and he hereby is, directed and empowered to use the entire land and naval forces of the United States, and to call into the actual service of the United States the militia of the several States, to such extent as may be necessary to carry these resolutions into effect.

A minority of the committee offer the following amendment, proposing a recognition of the Republic of Cuba as the true and lawful government of that island, and I favor its adoption:

Insert in line 4, after the word "independent," the following: "and that the Government of the United States hereby recognizes the Republic of Cuba as the true and lawful government of that island."

This republic is an organization that has maintained itself for more than three years against the power of Spain. Nearly two years ago Consul-General Lee reported to President Cleveland that the Spaniards stood no chance of ever suppressing the insurrection, and during the present week he testified before the Committee on Foreign Affairs that he does not think there is the slightest possibility of their being conquered by Spain and that peace can not be restored to the island by that power.

In December, 1895, the Secretary of State in his annual report showed the strength of the Cuban power at that time, and I make the following extract from this report:

Although statistics of their military strength are attainable with difficulty and are not always trustworthy when obtained, enough is certainly known to show that the revolutionists in the field greatly exceed in numbers any organization heretofore attempted; that with large accessions from the central and western districts of the island a better military discipline is added to increased strength; that instead of mainly drawing, as heretofore, upon the comparatively primitive population of eastern Cuba, the insurgent armies fairly represent the intelligent aspirations of a large proportion of the people of the whole island, and that they purpose to wage this contest, on these better grounds of vantage, to the end and to make the present struggle a supreme test of the capacity of the Cuban people to win for themselves and their children the heritage of self-government.

A notable feature of the actual situation is the tactical skill displayed by its leaders. When the disparity of numbers and the comparatively indefensible character of the central and western Vega country are considered, the passage of a considerable force into Pinar del Rio, followed by its successful maintenance there for many months, must be regarded as a military success of a pronounced character.

So, too, the Spanish force, in the field, in garrison on the island, or on its way thither from the mother country, is largely beyond any military display yet called for by a Cuban rising, thus affording an independent measure of the strength of the insurrection.

From every accessible indication it is clear that the present rebellion is on a far more formidable scale as to numbers, intelligence, and representative features than any of the preceding revolts of this century; that the corresponding effort of Spain for its repression has been enormously augmented, and that despite the constant influx of fresh armies and material of war from the metropolis, the rebellion, after nearly two years of successful resistance, appears to-day to be in a condition to indefinitely prolong the contest on its present lines.

There is a white population upon the island of 1,000,000 people, and 700,000 of these, according to the testimony before the Senate, are supporting or are in sympathy with this organized government. This government is an existing fact. It has a written constitution, adopted in October, 1895; the supreme power is vested in a President, Vice-President, and four secretaries of state; its authority is recognized over fully one-half of the territory of Cuba, which, the Committee on Foreign Affairs informs us, is held to the exclusion of Spain; its officers collect taxes and discharge other official functions, and have done so ever since the first few months of the war; it has in the field an army of more than 30,000 men, and represents a force strong and powerful enough to insure domestic tranquillity when the hand of war is withdrawn.

The President tells us in his recent message that "the long trial has proved that the object for which Spain has waged war can not be attained," and with this quotation I can leave this part of the subject.

I am not troubled by the suggestion that the proposed amendment trenches upon the prerogative of the Executive upon the theory that to him exclusively belongs the right to recognize a new member of the family of nations. Whether this is correct or not, when the recognition is a single act unaccompanied by no other proposition, is a question which Senators learned in the law have differed upon, but it is not a material question here. We are now called upon to act under a power granted exclusively to the Congress by the express terms of the Constitution, and the question of recognition is inseparably connected with it.

The President has realized that his powers are inadequate to deal with the subject. He has remitted it to the Congress. We are to reach a result that all admit requires the united action of two of the great departments of the Government, and the Executive stands back and says the legislative must take the lead. He will at the appropriate time act upon the pending resolution as a branch of the legislative department, and if passed with the proposed amendment and thus approved, I do not share in the doubt expressed by the Senator from Wisconsin [Mr. SPOONER], as to whether under such circumstances the recognition will be complete. What the legislative hand has signed the executive arm will surely execute.

The war is inevitable. I do not hesitate to say, in view of recent events, that it has begun. Spain struck the first blow when on the night of February 15 a Spanish submarine mine, without notice or warning, was sprung in Havana Harbor, and by the explosion the *Maine* was destroyed and hundreds of her officers, seamen, and marines were hurried into eternity.

This was practically recognized as an act of war on the 8th of March when, at the request of the President, the two Houses of Congress placed at his disposal \$50,000,000, to be used in his discretion for the national defense and every purpose connected therewith. Since that time the Departments and bureaus have sounded the note of preparation, our vessels have been prepared as rapidly as possible for active service, new vessels and munitions of war have been purchased at home and abroad, our fortifications have been strengthened, and patriotic citizens in all parts of the Union have offered their services in defense of their country when the two nations confront one another in the inevitable conflict which is approaching, while in the meantime Spain has employed like diligence in warlike preparation. The resolutions we are now considering will soon be followed by the raising of armies and the invasion of Cuba. When our forces land there, I agree entirely with the Senator from Kentucky [Mr. LINDSEY], in the proposition contained in his recent resolution, that the contemplated military operations of our armies should be carried on in concert with the forces of the Cuban Republic, commanded by Gen. Maximo Gomez, under suitable and proper arrangements to be entered into between the military authorities of the two Governments and with our generals in chief command.

The resolution is as follows:

First. That the contemplated military operations against the Spanish armies on the Island of Cuba should be carried on in concert with the military forces under the command of Gen. Maximo Gomez, such concert to be secured through arrangements between this Government and the Cuban revolutionary authorities recognized by said Gomez, and that any offer looking to such arrangements that may be made by those authorities should be favorably considered, provided it shall concede to the commanding officer of the United States troops the right to control and direct all military operations.

Second. That all such military operations should be carried on to the end that the independence of the Cuban Republic may be secured.

The two nationalities have a common purpose in view in their determination to forever terminate Spanish domination upon the island. They are natural allies in this emergency. The Cuban soldiers are acclimated; they know the country well and thoroughly, and their cooperation with us must speedily result in the occupation of the cities and strongholds by the American and Cuban armies.

I do not accept the view presented by the President in his recent message of the 11th of April, when he says that our forcible intervention to stop the war involves "hostile constraint upon both the parties to the contest, as well to enforce a truce as to guide the eventual settlement." I shrink with abhorrence from any idea that the approaching conflict is likely to result, under any circumstances, in imposing hostile constraint upon the Cubans who are defending themselves against Spanish tyranny.

Many of these people who have sought our shores to avoid the hard conditions now existing in their own land have settled in Florida, and they are for the most part peaceable and well-disposed citizens. They supply the skill and labor which have made an important addition to our manufactures at Key West, at Tampa, and at other points, and they have added largely to our wealth and resources. They are a liberty-loving people, and have contributed freely of their means to aid their countrymen who have carried on this prolonged contest for freedom and independence. They are an intelligent, well-informed people, interested in the education and moral training of their children, eager for information and knowledge and self-advancement.

These people here and at home have been taught to believe that Americans are their friends and that our Government and our free institutions are worthy models for them to follow in building up a new republic in the Island of Cuba. There should be nothing in our action here to drive them from us or to give any grounds for apprehension that a time may come before the coming contest is brought to a termination when the flag of the United States will symbolize hostile constraint upon those of their countrymen who are in arms against Spain.

We can make no better beginning than by declaring at the outset that the republic is free and independent, and with this free and independent government as an ally our cause will have the good will of the lovers of human liberty the world over. Such a recognition will relieve us of any well-founded charge of aggression or self-aggrandizement if we thus make it clear that we propose to claim no power, when the victory has been won, to force upon an unwilling people unwelcome rulers or unreasonable burdens or harsh conditions.

We have hitherto labored under an embarrassment in our negotiations with Spain, because we have not recognized any right in the Cuban Government to be considered or heard with reference to subjects in which she has vital interests, and arrangements are proposed which can only be successfully carried out with her consent. An armistice was proposed, to continue until October next; but how vain an armistice must be unless the Cuban military force is a party to it. It is often said that it takes two to make a quarrel, but it is equally as true that one man can not maintain the peace when his neighbor continues his attack upon him.

The Cuban Republic, as a recognized Government, can agree with Spain, if a proposition for an armistice is offered or can

authorize the United States to speak in her behalf, if we attempt to negotiate for her; but an unorganized population can agree to no armistice, and the pending resolution seems to contemplate only an unorganized population when it says "that the people of the Island of Cuba are, and of right ought to be, free and independent."

If the resolution of the committee is thus amended and our efforts are to be exerted in behalf of an independent republic and not to establish a government to be shaped under our dictation hereafter, I shall support the amended resolution. I may do so, though it will be with extreme reluctance, if the amendment should fail, in the hope and expectation that a recognition of the republic may be accomplished at a later day and that subsequent action may remove any unfavorable results that are apprehended from the passage of the resolution as it came from the committee.

Mr. President, the time at my disposal is limited, and I can not enter into the details of the subject as I should like, but we have passed the stage of prolonged debate. The time is at hand for action. I have the honor to represent in part a State that is peculiarly interested in this result: it is nearest the scene of action. During the continuance of the difficulties between Spain and the revolutionists there has been almost daily communication between the different ports of Cuba and our own harbors, and thousands of refugees have made their homes in our cities and towns. The sympathy that has been expressed and manifested for these unfortunate people has engendered the ill will of their enemies. We have a long line of coast around our State exposed at many important points to attack by an armed flotilla, and until recently there were no preparations for defensive warfare except at two points.

We may have to bear the brunt of the first shock of war, and our exposed position warns us that the danger of attack and invasion is imminent: but if war is necessary to defend the honor of our country, and to defend the young republic established almost within sight of our peninsula and the keys and islands around our coast, and to assist in making good the declaration of independence which its people have made, the people of Florida will accept the verdict which we will here render after a deliberate consideration of the situation as it has been presented, and will meet whatever results may follow calmly and courageously, and in the full confidence that the God of Battles will give to us the ultimate victory.

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